

## Chapter 2

# The Gascoignes of Thorp-on-the-Hill

William Gascoigne was the eldest son of Henry Gascoigne of Thorp-on-the-Hill near Middleton, in the parish of Rothwell. By the time of William's birth, Henry was living in comfortable circumstances, but at its outset, Henry's life had been scarred by tragedy. In 1589, aged only three, he became an orphan. In accordance with the dying wishes of their father, he and his sister, Elizabeth, were put into the care of their wealthy uncle, Richard Tempest of Tong.<sup>1</sup> In the Tempest household near Bradford brother and sister spent their early childhood years together, but by the time Henry was 12 they were separated as his custody and wardship was made over to his future father-in-law, William Cartwright of York.<sup>2</sup> An unsettling transfer—some would consider it heartless—but this was seventeenth century England: the wardship of such a minor was a commodity to be competed for. Sometimes it would be granted by the Court of Wards to a complete outsider, simply the highest bidder, keen to gain income and advantage from the orphan's assets. Not until 1611 would the law be changed to ensure that the next of kin had a prior right to the wardship.

As a ward, Henry brought benefits: Though bereft of parents, he was far from being destitute. His father, John, had bequeathed to Henry and Elizabeth 'manors, messuages, milnes, mines, land, tenements, rents [and] woods'.<sup>3</sup> These were assigned to William Cartwright 'until the children become of age or for 15 years'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> West Yorkshire Archive Service (Bradford), *Records of the Tempest Family of Tong Hall*, Tong/3/136, '.... On the death of the said John Gascoigne, the said Richard Tempest becomes guardian to the two children [Henry and Elizabeth] ....', 24 September 1598.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Tong/3/137, 29 September 1598.

<sup>3</sup> A *messuage* was a dwelling house, along with the land around it and any outbuildings. A *tenement* was property held by one person from another.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Tong/8/136, 24 September 1598. Ultimately, Henry—the heir to the estate—was to dispute the amount owed to him by Richard. This led to litigation over the sum of £1,980, which Henry claimed. The dispute was not fully settled until January 1610 (ref: Tong/7c/1). See also Cliffe, J.T., *The Yorkshire Gentry from the Reformation to the Civil War* (London, 1969), 377. The charges levied by the Court of Wards when it granted the wardship of Henry Gascoigne in 1591, whose estate was worth an annual income of £360, were: Fine, £4. 6s. 8d.; Rent, £3. 9s. 1d (Source: PRO, Court of Wards, Miscellaneous Books, Wards 9/cxviii/f.307 and cccxlvi (no pagination), quoted by Cliffe, J.T., *Op.Cit.*, 133).



**Fig. 2.1** St. Michael le Belfrey church in York (Author's collection)

It was clear that Henry would be a 'gentleman'. He would not have to earn his living by labour: He would derive a very comfortable income from land, mines and other assets. In short, from the labour of others. He would also inherit his father's right to a coat of arms and would therefore be known as Henry Gascoigne, *Armiger* (sometimes rendered in English as 'Esquire').

At the tender age of 13 Henry married Cartwright's daughter, Jane.<sup>5</sup> The wedding took place at the parish church of St. Michael le Belfrey (Fig. 2.1), adjacent to York Minister, on 5th January 1600.<sup>6</sup> The church register has the simple entry: 'Henrye gascoyne [and] Jane Cartwright was maryed w'th a Licence, the vth of January'. A licence wasn't cheap—only the gentry and nobility could normally afford one—but by the use of this device the couple avoided the need for banns to be read in the parishes of the bride and groom on three successive Sundays prior to the wedding. Thus, it provided a means of marrying in a hurry or keeping wedding arrangements private. The reason for the couple resorting to this procedure is not recorded.

Such a juvenile marriage as that of Henry and Jane, at the onset of puberty, was not unusual amongst the gentry and aristocracy. The match would be a calculated business transaction, arranged by parents, rather than the outcome of a romance. Very young newly-weds would not be expected to cohabit. By the time William—their first son and the subject of this story—was born, Henry and Jane had been

<sup>5</sup> The Registers of St. Michael le Belfrey, York, Part I (1565-1653), transcribed by Francis Collins (Yorkshire Parish Register Society, 1899), 84, 'WEDDINGES in Anno D'ni 1599 .... Henrye gascoyne [and] Jane Cartwright was maryed w'th a Licence the vth of January'. The use of a licence possibly shows that Henry and Jane were marrying outside their own parish. Henry's orphan status might also have been relevant.

<sup>6</sup> The narrative year is the one commencing on 1st January.

**Fig. 2.2** The Gascoigne coat of arms (Author's collection)



married for more than a decade. Although accounts differ, it appears that he was preceded by two sisters and, in due course, was followed by one sister and two brothers.

William's mother died when he was only 5 years old. She was buried at Rothwell parish church on the last day of August 1617—scarcely 8 months after the birth of her youngest son.<sup>7</sup> Not until 12 years after the burial of his childhood bride did Henry take a new partner. In July 1629, at the same church, he married Grace Thomas, the daughter of Richard Thomas of Thorp-on-the-Hill. In due course this new relationship produced several more children.

The preservation of information about the lineage of William Gascoigne has much to do with the fact that his ancestors were allowed to bear heraldic coats of arms—those exuberant, often colourful, personal adornments that marked out the privileged ranks of feudal society. Heraldry originated in the twelfth century as the use of distinctively painted shields to identify knights in armour on the battlefield. Shields would be passed down within families from father to son.

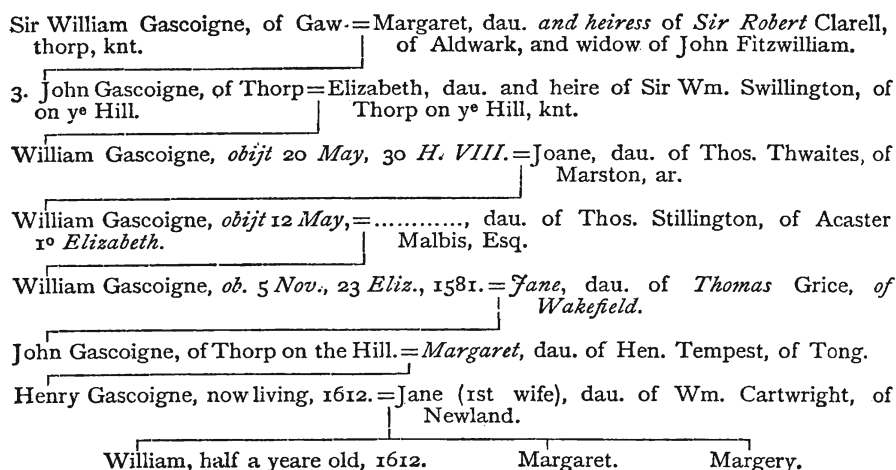
From the time of Henry I the right to grant arms was reserved to the sovereign. The inheritance of arms was governed by the Laws of Arms and the granting of them was delegated to the 'Kings of Arms'. The work of designing them and recording the relevant lines of descent was the job of the 'heralds'. It was even their job to identify the corpses of those slaughtered on the battlefield by checking the heraldic insignia on their armour. The coat of arms of the Gascoignes was rather simple—the severed head of a golden conger eel (Fig. 2.2).

Eventually, many coats of arms became more intricate or elaborate and all made their way from armour to more peaceful devices—such as signet rings and documents.

From 1530 to 1686 heralds embarked on numerous visits to the regions of England and Wales for the purpose of ensuring that anyone using a coat of arms was properly entitled to it through genealogical descent. Thus, the legitimate bearers of

<sup>7</sup> The Register of Rothwell Parish Church, ..., '1617 Burials ... Magistra Jana uxor Henrici Gascoigne armigeri sepulta fuit ultimo die Augusti.' [Teacher/Lady Jane wife of Henry Gascoigne Esquire was buried on the last day of August. Note that 'magistra' may be a transcription error. Wheeler, *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1863), 761, gives the register wording as 'Margaretta Jana'].]

## GASCOIGNE, OF THORP ON THE HILL.



## HENRY GASCOIGNE.

**Fig. 2.3** The family tree of the Gascoignes of Thorp-on-the-Hill (From *The Visitation of Yorkshire* (London, 1875), ed. J. Foster)

arms had their pedigrees, or family trees, recorded and scrutinised in the visitation records of the heralds.

Those considered to be unlawfully furnished with heraldry were subjected to public humiliation: forced to issue public disclaimers. Even the dead were not immune: any monument to the deceased, in church or graveyard, which bore suspect arms, would be torn down by the more zealous heralds.

When William Gascoigne was in his first year, Yorkshire received a 'Visitation' from one of the more prominent heralds: Sir Richard St. George. An active herald, a learned genealogist and the head of a dynasty of heralds, St. George had entered the College of Arms with the rank of Windsor in 1602 and became Norroy King of Arms in 1604.<sup>8</sup> In the course of his 1612 visitation, he meticulously recorded the pedigree of the Gascoignes of Thorp-on-the-Hill, from the half-year old William back through seven generations (see Fig. 2.3).

The pedigree of the Cartwrights of Newland, the family of William's mother, is also preserved in the same visitation records. Here, the young William is depicted at the end of a line of descent going through three generations.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Wagner, Sir Anthony, *Heralds of England: A History of the Office and College of Arms* (London, 1967), 226.

<sup>9</sup> Foster, Joseph, *The Visitation of Yorkshire made in the Years 1584/5, by Robert Glover, Somerset herald; to which is added The Subsequent Visitation made in 1612, by Richard St. George, Norroy King of Arms*, (London, 1875), 520.

The tracing of family trees and pedigrees was also a pre-occupation of various independent scholars, such as the respected Lofthouse antiquary, John Hopkinson, to whom a monument was erected in Rothwell parish church. Hopkinson had the rare distinction of being under the protection of both sides in the Civil War. Both Lord Fairfax and William, Marquesse of Newcastle—leaders of the Parliamentarians and Royalists respectively—issued special instructions to their troops not to molest Hopkinson or his family, so valuable did they consider his work.<sup>10</sup> His pedigree for the Gascoignes of Thorp-on-the-Hill was devised many decades later and continues the family tree beyond the death of William, the astronomer.

Despite occasional mistakes and contradictions, the pedigrees produced under the auspices of heraldic visits and by the efforts of antiquaries provide valuable information. Those arising from the 1612 *Visitation* were edited and privately printed in 1875 by Joseph Foster.

Since the mid-sixteenth century parish churches in England have been keeping records of baptisms, burials and marriages. A directive of Thomas Cromwell in 1538 required that such records be preserved in a ‘secure coffer’, or parish chest. It was not until the very end of the nineteenth century, however, that parish register societies started the work of transcribing the handwritten registers and publishing their content. These form perhaps a more reliable record than antiquaries’ pedigrees.

Most accounts of William Gascoigne hitherto, have based themselves on secondary sources published before the 1870s, whose authors—not having easy access to either visitation records or parish registers—confined themselves to the pedigrees produced by antiquaries.

The various pedigrees are slightly at odds concerning William’s siblings (see Fig. 2.4). The 1612 *Visitation* version only gives two sisters—Margaret and Margery—whereas Thoresby’s 1715 version makes no mention of Margaret: Margery is given as Jane’s only daughter, and two brothers make an appearance—Henry and John. The parish registers introduce further siblings.

Of the graves of the Gascoignes of Thorp-on-the-Hill no trace remains. The most durable should have been that of William’s half-sister Ellinor, who died in 1663 and was buried under the floor of the chancel in Holy Trinity parish church in Rothwell, but the inscribed tombstone is no longer visible.<sup>11</sup>

The location and date of William’s birth, despite freshly published registers, remains shrouded in obscurity. No one has so far found any Parish Register record

<sup>10</sup> Whitaker, Thomas Dunham, *Leodis and Elmete* (Leeds, 1816), 242.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 242. The inscription read ‘Hic jacet Hellenora Henrici Gascoigne Arm. Nuper de Thorp filia, uxor fidelis Arthuri Ingram jun. De Knottingley, trium liberorum charissima mater Anno xxiv mortem obiit, cujus pietatis & immaculatae virtutis exemplum non solum aevo praesenti sed praeter invidium futur . . . . imitari debet 1669.’ The Rothwell Parish Register, by contrast, records ‘May 2, 1663 Elena uxr. Arthuri Ingram generosi de Thorpe sepult fuit die p’dic.’

	Children of Jane m.5 Jan 1600 b.31 Aug 1617						Children of Grace m.25 Jul 1629					
St George Visitation (H Gascoigne) – 1612	Margaret	Margery	William ½ yr old									
Ralph Thoresby – 1715			William d.Melton		Henry	John					Ellinor or Ellen	
John Hopkinson – 1730	Margaret	Margery	William d.Melton		Henry d. London	John d. Oxford			Richard		Margaret	Ellinor
Rothwell Parish Register (Christenings)				Elizabeth 1 Jan 1614	Henry 22 Sep 1615	John 1 Jan 1617	Thomas 13 Apr 1631	Maria 13 Sep 1632	Richard 26 Mar 1634	George 13 Jan 1636	Margaret 20 Sep 1637	Ellen 19 Nov 1639
Rothwell Parish Register (Burials)								Maria 12 Aug 1645	Richard 14 Feb 1641	George 3 Apr 1636	Margaret 19 Apr 1647	Ellen 2 May 1663

Fig. 2.4 The siblings of William Gascoigne according to various sources

of the christening or baptism of William, the putative astronomer. Likewise no unambiguous marriage record has been identified.<sup>12</sup>

We would have had no occasion, however, to look into any matter concerning the background of this young Yorkshire astronomer, had it not been for an intriguing discovery by a French scientist and his keenness to share that discovery with English friends.

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<sup>12</sup> The Rothwell Parish Register has the following entry for 8th September 1630: “Willus Gascoigne et Rosomond Townend nupt’ fuer’...”. It is not certain that this refers to William Gascoigne of Thorp-on-the-Hill.

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